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IROQUOIS SUN MYTHS

BY ARTHUR C. PARKER

THE Iroquois of New York and Canada still retain vestiges of their former adoration of the sun, and observe certain rites, very likely survivals of more elaborate sun ceremonies.

The writer has witnessed several so-called "sun-dances" among the Iroquois; but in every case the dance was the *Ostowä'gowä*, or Great Feather Dance, the prime religious dance of the *Gai'wiu* religion. This modern religion was originated about 1800 by *Ganio' dai'u* ("Handsome-Lake"), the Seneca prophet, and almost entirely revolutionized the religious system of the Iroquois of New York and Ontario. Few of the early folk-beliefs have survived the taboo of the prophet; and these beliefs are not easily traced, or even discovered, unless one has before him the *Gai'wiu* of Handsome-Lake and the Code of *Dekanowi'da*, the founder of the Confederacy.

The Seneca sun ceremony, *Ėndéka Dä'kwa Dännon'dinon'nio'* ("Day Orb-of-light Thanksgiving"), is called by any individual who dreams that the rite is necessary for the welfare of the community. The ceremony begins promptly at high noon, when three showers of arrows or volleys from muskets are shot heavenward to notify the sun of the intention to address him. After each of the volleys the populace shout their war-cries, "for the sun loves war." A ceremonial fire is built, — anciently by the use of a pump-drill, modernly by a match, — and the sun-priest chants his thanksgiving song, casting from a husk basket handfuls of native tobacco upon the flames as he sings. This ceremony takes place outside of the Long House, where the rising smoke may lift the words of the speaker to the sun. Immediately after this, the entire assemblage enters the Long House, where the costumed Feather dancers start the *Ostowä'gowä*.

Among the Onondaga of the Grand River Reserve in Ontario, the leader of the sun ceremony carries an effigy of the sun. This is a disk of wood ten inches in diameter, fastened to a handle perhaps a foot long. The disk is painted red in the centre, and has a border of yellow. Around the edge are stuck yellow-tipped down-feathers from some large bird. The New York Iroquois have no such effigies, and the writer seriously doubts that the preachers of Handsome-Lake's *Gai'wiu* would permit such a practice, it being a violation of the prophet's teaching. The Canadian Iroquois, however, received the revelations later than their New York brethren, and were longer under the influence of the older religion, which may account for the survival and use of the sun-disk.

The writer has discovered several sun myths among the Seneca,

the one which follows being related by Edward Cornplanter, Soson'-dowa ("Great Night"), the recognized head preacher of the Gai'wiu of Handsome-Lake. Cornplanter is a Seneca, and a descendant of Gaiänt'waka, the prophet's brother.

The fragments of the cosmological myths which conclude this article are from a mass of ethnological and folk-lore data which it is hoped will shortly be edited and published.

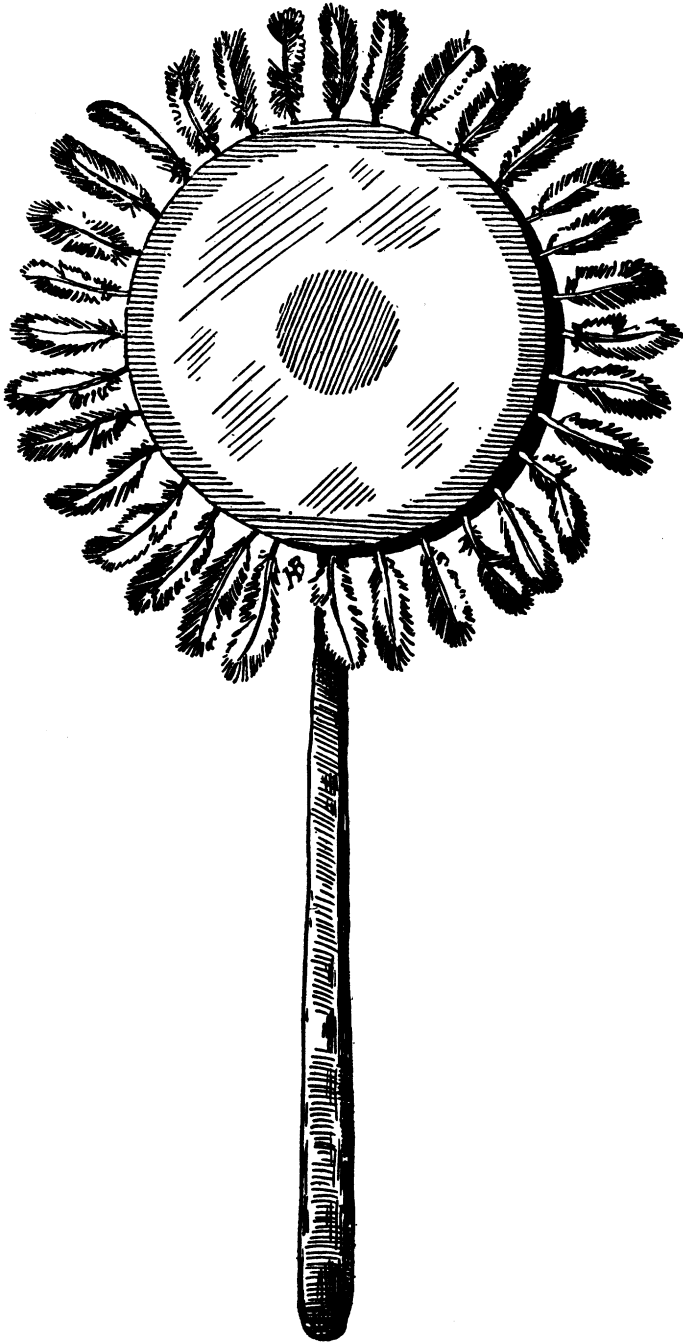
THREE BROTHERS WHO FOLLOWED THE SUN UNDER THE SKY'S RIM

This happened in old times, when there were not many people. There were three brothers, and they were not married. They were hunters, and had spent their lives hunting. When the brothers were young, they enjoyed the excitement of hunting; but as they grew older, it did not give them so much pleasure. The youngest brother suggested that for new experiences they walk to the edge of the earth, where the sky comes down and touches the big sea of salt water. There is salt water west, and this world is an island. The other brothers thought the plan a good one; and when they had prepared everything, they started on the journey. They travelled a good many years, and a good many things happened to them. They always went straight westward.

At last the brothers came to a place where the sun goes under the sky's edge. The sky bends down there, and sinks into the water. They camped there for a month, and watched the things that happened there. They noticed how the sun got under the rim of the sky and went away quickly. Some men came there and tried to get under the edge of the sky, but it descended quickly and crushed them. There is a road there. Now they noticed that when the sky came up, the water sank lower; and that when the sky went in the water, the water rose higher.

The younger brothers desired to pass under the rim of the sky when the sun slipped under on his road; but the elder brother said that the happenings were too evilly mysterious, and that he was afraid. The younger brothers ran under the rim of the sky quickly, and the rim was very thick. They kept on the road, and water was on each side. They were afraid that the sky would come down and crush them. Now, the oldest brother, it is said, watched them; and when he saw that nothing happened to injure his brothers, he began to run after them. The younger brothers turned from their safe place to encourage him; but the sky came down on the sun's road and crushed him, but they saw his spirit (notwai'shäⁿ) shoot by quickly. The brothers felt sad.

On the other side of the sky everything is different, so it is said. Before the brothers was a large hill; and when they had ascended it,



EFFIGY OF THE SUN CARRIED BY THE LEADER OF THE
SUN CEREMONY OF THE ONTARIO ONONDAGA

they saw a very large village in the distance. A man came running toward them. He was in the distance; but he came nearer, and he called out, "Come!" It was their elder brother. "How did you come so quickly, brother?" they asked. "We did not see you come."

The brother answered only, "I was late." He passed by on a road.

An old man came walking toward them. He was youthful and his body was strong, but his hair was long and white. He was an old man. His face was wise-looking, and he seemed a chief.

"I am the father of the people in the Above-the-Sky-Place," he said. "Hawěni'u is my son. I wish to advise you, because I have lived here a long time. I have always lived here, but Hawěni'u was born of the woman on the island. When you see Hawěni'u, call quickly, 'Niawěⁿ'skänoⁿ!' If you fail to speak first, he will say, 'You are mine,' and you will be spirits, as your brother is."

The brothers proceeded, and saw a high house made of white bark. They walked up the path to the door. A tall man stepped out quickly, and the brothers said, "Niawěⁿ'skänoⁿ!" and the great man said, "Dogěⁿs', I have been watching you for a long time." The brothers entered the house. Now, when they were in the house, the man said, "In what condition are your bodies?" The brothers answered, "They are fine bodies." The great man answered, "You do not speak the truth. I am Hawěni'u, and I know all about your bodies. One of you must lie down, and I will purify him, and then the other."

One brother lay down, and Hawěni'u placed a small shell to his lips, and put it on the brother's mouth. He also tapped him on the neck, and sealed the shell with clay. He began to skin the brother. He took apart the muscles, and then scraped the bones. He took out the organs and washed them. Then Hawěni'u built the man again. He loosened the clay and rubbed his neck. He did this with both brothers; and they sat up, and said, "It seems as if we had slept." Hawěni'u said, "Every power of your bodies is renewed. I will test you."

The brothers followed Hawěni'u to a fine grove of trees surrounded by a thick hedge. All kinds of flowers were blooming outside. "My deer are here," said Hawěni'u.

A large buck with wide antlers ran toward them. "He is the swift-est of my runners. Try and catch him," said Hawěni'u.

The men ran after the deer, and rapidly overtook him. "He has given us good speed," the brothers said. They soon discovered that they had many surpassing abilities, and the great man tested them all on that day.

They returned to the white lodge, and the brothers saw a messenger running toward them. Upon his wide chest was a bright ball of

light. It was very brilliant. In some unknown language he shouted to Hawëni'u and dashed on.

"Do you understand his words, or do you know that man?" asked Hawëni'u. "He is the sun, my messenger. Each day he brings me news. Nothing from east to west escapes his eye. He has just told me of a great war raging between your people and another nation. Let us look down on the earth and see what is happening."

They all went to a high hill in the middle of the country, and looked down through a hole where a tree had been uprooted. They saw two struggling bands of people and all the houses burning. They could hear people crying and yelling their war-cries.

"Men will always do this," said Hawëni'u, and then they went down the hill.

The brothers stayed a long time in the upper world, and learned so much that they never could tell it all. Sometimes they looked down on the earth and saw villages in which no one lived. They knew that they were waiting for people to be born and live there. In the upper world they saw villages, likewise, awaiting the coming of people. Hawëni'u told them a good many things, and after a time told a messenger to lead them to the path that the sun took when he came out on the earth in the morning. They followed the messenger and came out on the earth. They waited until the sun went over the earth and had gone to the west. Again then they went under the edge of the sky in the east, and came out in their country again. It was night, and they slept on the ground. In the morning they saw their own village, and it was overgrown with trees. They followed a path through the woods, and came upon another village. Their own people were there, and they went into a council-house and talked. They told their story; and no one knew them except their own sister, who was an aged woman.

"The war of which you speak took place fifty years ago," the sister said.

The brothers did not care for the earth now, but wished themselves back in the upper world. They were not like other men, for they never grew tired. They were very strong and could chase animals and kill them with their hands. Nothing could kill them, neither arrows nor disease. After a while, both were struck by lightning, and then they were both killed.

It seems quite likely that there are modern features in this legend; but my informant assured me that the portion relating to the sky and the sun was very old. He said also that he had always heard the upper world described as related in the legend. He added that the sun loved the sound of war, and would linger in his morning jour-

ney to see a battle, but that after he reached mid-heaven he travelled at his usual speed.

Mrs. Asher Wright, who spoke Seneca perfectly, and who labored as a missionary among them for fifty years, recorded two Seneca myths as they had been related to her by Esquire Johnson, an old Seneca chief. One describes the origin of good and evil, and says that the sun was made by the Good-Minded spirit from the face of his mother. That legend makes the first woman the mother of the twins. The second manuscript, dated 1876, relates practically the same story, but mentions the Sky-Woman as having borne first a daughter, who became, without any knowledge of man, the mother of the twins. The mother, having died at their birth, was buried by her mother. The Sky-Woman, the grandmother, then turned and addressed the Good-Minded spirit, according to Esquire Johnson, quoted by Mrs. Wright, as follows:

"Now you must go and seek your father. When you see him, you must ask him to give you power." Pointing to the east, she said, "He lives in that direction. You must keep on until you reach the limits of the Island, and then upon the waters until you reach a high mountain which rises up out of the water, and which you must climb to the summit. There you will see a wonderful being sitting on the highest peak. You must say, 'I am your son.'"

The "wonderful being" appears from the succeeding text to be the sun, although not specifically so named.

We thus have three conflicting ideas presented, — the sun as the messenger of the Creator and as the patron of war, as the face of the first mother, and as the father of mankind of earthly origin, — although this latter conclusion may be disputed by some for lack of a definite reference.

This leads us to the fact that Iroquois mythology in its present state has been derived from several sources. This has been caused, without doubt, by the policy of adopting the remnants of conquered tribes. Thus we may expect that in Iroquois mythology are the survivals of early Huron, Neutral, Erie, and Andaste elements. It is now only possible to trace the Huron. Algonquian elements came in through the Delaware, the Chippewa, the Shawnee, the Munsee, the Mahikan, and possibly the Nanticoke. It is not difficult to trace Siouan influence.

The writer has been able to trace some of the influencing elements to their sources, but it is nevertheless admitted that the problem of critically sifting and comparing Iroquois myths is a delicate task.